

In the Claims

1. (currently amended) A system for dermatological examination of the skin tissue of a patient comprising:

means for maintaining an area of the skin tissue under stress by application of force; and  
an imaging head, coupled to said maintaining means, capable of imaging a section of said stressed skin tissue from light returned from focused light under the surface of said skin tissue to provide therewith an integrated assembly in which said stress applied to said tissue stabilizes said skin tissue with respect to said imaging head.

2. (original) The system according to Claim 1 wherein said maintaining means further comprises:

a platen which is positionable with respect to said patient, said platen having an orifice, and said imaging head being coupled to said platen and positioned for imaging through said orifice; and

first means for moving said platen from an up position in which said platen is spaced from said patient to a down position onto the surface of said skin tissue of the patient, whereby in said down position the force of said platen provides said stressed skin tissue within said orifice.

3. (original) The system according to Claim 2 wherein said maintaining means further comprises:

second means coupled to said platen for moving said platen with respect to said patient and temporarily fixing the position of said platen so that said skin tissue to be imaged is located within said orifice when said first means moves said platen to said down position.

4. (currently amended) A The system according to Claim 3 for dermatological examination of the skin tissue of a patient comprising:

means for maintaining an area of the skin tissue under stress by application of force, and an imaging head, coupled to said maintaining means, capable of imaging a section of said stressed skin tissue to provide therewith an integrated assembly, wherein said maintaining means further comprises:

a platen which is positionable with respect to said patient, said platen having an orifice, and said imaging head being coupled to said platen and positioned for imaging through said orifice;

first means for moving said platen from an up position in which said platen is spaced from said patient to a down position onto the surface of said skin tissue of the patient, whereby in said down position the force of said platen provides said stressed skin tissue within said orifice; and

second means coupled to said platen for moving said platen with respect to said patient and temporarily fixing the position of said platen so that said skin tissue to be imaged is located within said orifice when said first means moves said platen to said down position, wherein said second means further comprises:

a table having a surface supporting said patient and two opposing sides spaced apart from each other on opposite sides of said patient;

two first rails, each of said first rails being parallel to each other and located upon a different one of said opposing sides;

two second rails orthogonal to said first rails which are parallel to each other and movable together along said first rails;

a carriage supporting said platen which is movable along said second rails;

means for locking said second rails at a position with respect to said first rails; and

means for locking said carriage at a position with respect to said second rails.

5. (original) The system according to Claim 4 wherein said first means comprises a plurality of rods coupling said platen to said carriage for positioning said platen in one of said up and down positions.

6. (original) The system according to Claim 2 wherein said maintaining means further comprises:

means coupled to said imaging head and said platen for translating said imaging head with respect to said orifice of said platen.

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7. (currently amended) ~~A~~ The system according to Claim 6 for dermatological examination of the skin tissue of a patient comprising:

means for maintaining an area of the skin tissue under stress by application of force, and an imaging head, coupled to said maintaining means, capable of imaging a section of said stressed skin tissue to provide therewith an integrated assembly, wherein said maintaining means further comprises:

a platen which is positionable with respect to said patient, said platen having an orifice, and said imaging head being coupled to said platen and positioned for imaging through said orifice;

first means for moving said platen from an up position in which said platen is spaced from said patient to a down position onto the surface of said skin tissue of the patient, whereby in said down position the force of said platen provides said stressed skin tissue within said orifice; and

means coupled to said imaging head and said platen for translating said imaging head with respect to said orifice of said platen, wherein said platen further comprises a recording media, and said translating mean further comprises a translation stage and a marker coupled to said translation stage which is positioned over said media to record the motion of said translating stage as it moves said imaging head over said stressed tissue within said orifice.

8. (original) The system according to Claim 2 wherein said orifice has a plate positioned therein.

9-18. (cancelled)

19. (original) The system according to Claim 1 wherein said imaging head is a confocal imaging head having confocal imaging optics for providing images of section of said stressed skin tissue.

20. (original) An apparatus for stabilizing the skin tissue of a patient to an imaging head comprising:

a platen having an orifice;

first means for moving said platen from an up position in which said platen is spaced from said patient to a down position onto the surface of said skin tissue of the patient; and

second means for moving said platen over the patient and temporarily fixing the position of the platen with respect to said patient wherein the skin tissue to be imaged by said imaging head is stabilized within said orifice when said platen is in a down position.

21. (original) The system according to Claim 20 wherein said second means further comprises:

a table having a surface supporting said patient and two opposing sides spaced apart from each other on opposite sides of said patient;

two first rails, each of said first rails being parallel to each other and located upon a different one of said opposing sides;

two second rails orthogonal to said first rails which are parallel to each other and movable together along said first rails;

a carriage supporting said platen which is movable along said second rails;

means for locking said second rails at a position with respect to said first rails; and

means for locking said carriage at a position with respect to said second rails.

22. (original) The system according to Claim 21 wherein said first means comprises a plurality of rods coupling said platen to said carriage for positioning said platen in one of said up and down positions.

23. (previously amended) The system according to Claim 20 wherein said maintaining means further comprises:

means, coupled to said imaging head and said platen, for translating said imaging head with respect to said orifice of said platen.

24-25. (cancelled)

26. (previously amended) A system for examining tissue comprising:

means for maintaining an area of the tissue under stress by application of force upon said tissue; and

an imaging head, coupled to said maintaining means, capable of imaging said stressed tissue from light returned from a scanned focal spot through said tissue to provide an image of a section.

27. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 1 wherein said maintaining means comprises a platen having means through which said tissue is imaged by said imaging head.

28. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 27 wherein said platen is positionable with respect to said tissue.

29. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 1 further comprising means for fixing the position of said maintaining means with respect to said patient.

30. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 1 wherein said imaging head is movable with respect to said maintaining means to position said imaging head with respect to said stressed tissue.

31. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 1 wherein said maintaining means applies force against at least the edges of said area of the skin tissue.

32. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 26 wherein said tissue represents one of skin tissue and internal tissue.

33. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 26 wherein said maintaining means applies force against at least the edges of said area of the tissue.

34. (previously presented) The system according to Claim 26 wherein said imaging head is movable with respect to said maintaining means to position said imaging head with respect to said stressed tissue.

35. (currently amended) A method for examination of tissue comprising the steps of:  
providing a platen having an opening;  
maintaining an area of the tissue under stress by application of said platen upon said tissue; and

imaging a section of said stressed tissue through said opening of said platen from light returned from focused light under the surface of said skin tissue in which said stress applied to said tissue promotes stabilization of said tissue with respect to images produced by said imaging step.

36. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 35 further comprising the step of:

positioning said platen with respect to the area of the tissue to be imaged.

37. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 35 wherein said opening of said platen has a material window.

38-41. (cancelled)

42. (new) The system according to Claim 1 wherein said section represents one of a horizontal, vertical or angled section through said tissue.

43. (new) An apparatus for dermatological examination of the tissue of a patient comprising:

means for maintaining an area of the skin tissue under stress by application of force; and  
means for imaging, coupled to said maintaining means, capable of imaging sections through different planes of said stressed tissue in which said stress applied to said tissue stabilizes said tissue with respect to said imaging head.

44. (new) The system according to Claim 43 wherein said sections are one of horizontal, vertical, or angled sections through said different planes of said stressed tissue.

45. (new) The system according to Claim 43 wherein said imaging means images said sections of said stressed skin tissue from light returned from focused light under the surface of said tissue.

46. (new) The system according to Claim 43 wherein said maintaining means represents one of a platen, brace, or deformable diaphragm.